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Findings

- Research published this past year indicated that Turkic and Muslim individuals formerly detained in mass internment camps continued to serve long prison terms. Official figures on prosecutions in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) released in February 2022 and analyzed by Human Rights Watch showed that more than half a million people had been sentenced and imprisoned in the region since 2017, when authorities began carrying out the mass detention, in both prisons and mass internment camps, of Turkic Muslims.
- On August 31, 2022, minutes before the end of her tenure, then-U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet issued a long-awaited report on human rights in the XUAR, determining that Chinese authorities had committed a wide range of serious human rights violations as part of counterterrorism and counter-extremism strategies. In particular, the report found that the “arbitrary and discriminatory detention” of Uyghurs and other predominantly Muslim ethnic groups in the XUAR may constitute crimes against humanity.
- During this reporting year, authorities in the XUAR maintained a system of forced labor that involved former mass internment camp detainees and other Turkic and Muslim individuals. Officials continued two distinct types of forced labor—one involving current and former mass internment camp detainees, and the other, referred to as “poverty alleviation through labor transfer” (*tuopin zhuanayi jiuye*), involving people who usually have not been detained, often referred to as “surplus labor.”
- Zero-COVID measures and discriminatory policies toward Uyghurs reportedly caused or contributed to deaths and injuries during a fire that took place on November 24, 2022, at a high-rise apartment building in Urumqi municipality, XUAR. Immediately following the incident, authorities suppressed information about the fire, which they viewed as a national security issue, including by holding Uyghur survivors for questioning at a local hotel and confiscating their phones, and by detaining neighbors and acquaintances of victims who posted about the fire on social media.
- A report published in November 2022 by the Uyghur Human Rights Project provided evidence showing that Chinese Communist Party and government authorities had incentivized and likely forced marriages between Han Chinese and Uyghur and other Turkic individuals in the XUAR since at least 2014. The report outlined how authorities promoted the assimilation of Uyghurs and other ethnic minorities through interethnic marriages against a backdrop of government and Party birth restriction policies and policies to encourage Han Chinese immigration and the movement of ethnic minority laborers out of the XUAR.

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- Reports published this past year indicated that XUAR officials continued to arbitrarily detain and hold in detention ethnic Kazakhs, members of an ethnic group numbering around 1.5 million in the region. Kazakhstan-based relatives of many ethnic Kazakhs who have been detained in the XUAR since 2017 have campaigned publicly for their release.

Recommendations

Members of the U.S. Congress and Administration officials are encouraged to take the following actions:

- Codify the definition of and punishment for crimes against humanity in U.S. law, and vote to create a binding international convention on crimes against humanity at the United Nations.
- Create a formal coordination group on Uyghur refugee admissions with Canada and other like-minded countries.
- Seek to ensure full implementation of the Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act, including obligations regarding the documentation of human rights abuses in the XUAR; the protection of American citizens and residents from harassment and coercion by the Chinese government; and the Chinese government's acquisition and development of mass surveillance technology.
- Urge Chinese authorities to immediately cease all programs involving the forced labor of mass internment camp detainees and prisoners in the XUAR, along with programs involving the forced labor of other ethnic minority individuals within and outside the XUAR.
- Raise concerns about China's treatment of Uyghurs and other Turkic and Muslim ethnic minorities during the Universal Periodic Review of China at the United Nations in early 2024.
- Coordinate with allies and partners to advocate for the formation of a U.N. commission of inquiry to investigate forced labor abuses involving Turkic and Muslim XUAR residents.
- Work with allies and partners to raise awareness about the transnational repression of Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims from the XUAR, including through discussion of digital rights. Seek ways to ensure that Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims in the United States and other countries can be free from surveillance, intimidation, and harassment by Chinese Communist Party and government actors.
- Work with allies and partners to counter third countries' cooperation with China in conducting transnational repression, including the refoulement, surveillance, and harassment of Uyghurs and other Turkic and Muslim Chinese nationals. Impose sanctions, including freezing assets and restricting travel, on officials in China and third countries who participate in such transnational repression. Advocate for the appointment of a U.N. Special Rapporteur on transnational repression.
- Prioritize the resettlement of Uyghurs, ethnic Kazakhs, and other Turkic and Muslim refugees in the United States, including by creating a Priority 2 designation for them in the United States' refugee admissions program. Urge other like-minded

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countries to implement similar refugee resettlement programs for Turkic and Muslim refugees from China. Identify countries likely to deport Turkic and Muslim refugees from China and engage these countries through diplomatic channels to prevent such deportations.

- Direct the U.S. State Department and U.S. Agency for International Development to create programming to provide care for former mass internment camp detainees, to include such psychosocial counseling and other assistance as may be necessary to address the trauma they have faced.
- Work with officials at American universities to protect Uyghur and other Turkic and Muslim students who hold a Chinese passport and/or who speak out about human rights abuses in the XUAR, and ensure that they enjoy freedom of expression and are protected from harassment and threats to their safety.
- In interactions with Chinese officials, call for the release of Uyghur political prisoners currently detained or imprisoned for the peaceful exercise of their human rights. The records of detained Uyghurs in the Commission's Political Prisoner Database provide a useful resource for such advocacy. Urge the Chinese government and its law enforcement and security forces to end the use of arbitrary detention, disappearance, beatings, torture, and intimidation to suppress and punish Uyghurs for the peaceful exercise of their rights.

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Xi Jinping Visits the XUAR

In July 2022, Chinese leader Xi Jinping made a visit to the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) for the first time since April 2014, which international observers viewed as promoting a single Chinese identity for all ethnic groups in the region.¹ While visiting the city of Shihezi, Xi praised a division of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC) for its contributions to “social stability.”² Xi’s visit to the region came several months before the 20th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in October 2022 and his bid for an unprecedented third term as General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party.³ The visit also followed the completion of a five-year plan for achieving “comprehensive stability” in the XUAR as outlined by then-Minister of Public Security Zhao Kezhi in a classified speech in June 2018.⁴ In his speech, Zhao described Xi’s knowledge, support, and direction of mass detentions and other repressive policies in the region.⁵ The first year of the plan started around the time mass internment camps appeared in 2017, and ended in 2021, when the region was slated to reach “comprehensive stability.”⁶ By the time of Xi’s July 2022 visit, many former mass internment camp detainees were either serving prison sentences or taking part in forced labor.⁷

CALLS FOR ACCOUNTABILITY FOR CHINA AT THE U.N. FOR RIGHTS ABUSES IN THE XUAR

U.N. Report Documents Rights Violations in the XUAR
<p>On August 31, 2022, minutes before the end of her tenure, U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet issued a long-awaited report on human rights in the XUAR, determining that Chinese authorities had committed a wide range of serious human rights violations as part of counterterrorism and counter-extremism strategies.⁸ In particular, the report found that the “arbitrary and discriminatory detention” of Uyghurs and other predominantly Muslim ethnic groups in the XUAR may constitute crimes against humanity.⁹ The report of the Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights also specifically documented rights abuses committed by Chinese authorities, including cultural and religious persecution, rape, torture, violations of reproductive rights, and forced labor.¹⁰</p>

**U.N. Report Documents Rights Violations in the
XUAR—Continued**

Many rights advocates and other observers praised the report, with some calling it a powerful vindication of efforts to document rights abuses,¹¹ while others criticized the report's delayed release and its failure to refer to the rights abuses in the region as genocide.¹² In early September 2022, a number of independent U.N. experts known as Special Procedures issued a statement calling the report "comprehensive and principled," and calling for the U.N. Human Rights Council to convene a special session on China, in addition to other actions.¹³ PRC officials had long sought to block the publication of the report, and succeeded both in delaying its publication and reportedly in watering down text regarding the forced sterilization of women.¹⁴ The report's issuance followed a May 2022 visit by Bachelet, in her capacity as U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, to the XUAR that was highly criticized by human rights groups¹⁵ and scholars,¹⁶ who said she failed to hold Chinese authorities accountable for their repression of Uyghurs and other ethnic minorities in the region.¹⁷

Additional examples of U.N. actions on human rights in the XUAR include the following:

- On October 6, 2022, the U.N. Human Rights Council voted against a proposal, led by the United States, to hold a debate on the human rights situation in the XUAR, with 19 Council Member States voting against the proposal, 17 supporting the proposal, and 11 abstaining from the vote.¹⁸ Human rights advocates expressed concern over the Council's rejection of the proposal, with Amnesty International Secretary General Agnes Callamard noting that it "puts the U.N.'s main human rights body in the farcical position of ignoring the findings of the U.N.'s own human rights office."¹⁹
- On November 24, 2022, the U.N. Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, acting under its early warning and urgent action procedure,²⁰ issued a decision calling on China to release all individuals who had been arbitrarily detained and to take other actions to improve the human rights situation in the XUAR.²¹
- In March 2023, in its concluding observations on the third periodic report of China, the U.N. Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights called for an end to rights violations against Turkic and Muslim peoples in the XUAR and expressed concern over worker rights, forced homestay programs, forced birth control measures, and the destruction of religious sites in the XUAR.²²
- In May 2023, during its review of China, members of the U.N. Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW Committee) questioned Chinese representatives about human rights violations against Uyghur and other Turkic Muslim women, including forced birth control measures, forced marriage, forced labor, detention, and sexual violence.²³ [For information on reports submitted to the Committee in advance of its review of China, see Persecution of Ethnic Minority Women in the XUAR in this chapter.]

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U.S. Legislation Targets Organ Harvesting, Seeks Accountability for Genocide

Legislation introduced in the U.S. Congress during the Commission's 2023 reporting year targeted human rights abuses affecting Uyghurs and others in China. In March 2023, the House of Representatives passed H.R. 1154, the Stop Forced Organ Harvesting Act of 2023, by a vote of 413 to 2.²⁴ The bill aims to combat forced organ removal perpetrated against Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims in the XUAR, as well as other political prisoners, and authorizes sanctions against individuals complicit in organ harvesting.²⁵ In May 2023, S. 1770, the Uyghur Genocide Accountability and Sanctions Act of 2023, was introduced in the U.S. Senate.²⁶ The bill calls for the expansion of sanctions on Chinese officials and entities that are complicit in the genocide of Uyghurs, among other provisions.²⁷

Turkic Muslims Sentenced to Lengthy Prison Terms

Research published this past year indicated that Turkic and Muslim individuals formerly detained in mass internment camps continued to serve long prison terms.²⁸ Official figures on prosecutions in the XUAR released in February 2022 and analyzed by Human Rights Watch showed that more than half a million people had been sentenced and imprisoned in the region since 2017, when authorities began carrying out the mass detention, in both prisons and mass internment camps, of Turkic Muslims.²⁹ As reported by Human Rights Watch in September 2022, data showing a sharp increase in sentences of more than five years in 2017 indicates that the “the vast majority of the 540,826 people prosecuted most likely remain in prison.”³⁰ According to a researcher at Human Rights Watch, Chinese officials may have intended to deflect attention from mass detention in the XUAR by using formal prosecutions, but many of the convictions imposed “just add to the crimes against humanity of wrongful imprisonment against Uyghurs and other Turkic people.”³¹ Authorities did not hold trials for many of those sentenced to prison.³² A report published by Sky News in May 2023 found that authorities had decommissioned some mass internment camps, converting some facilities into schools and abandoning others, and had expanded and enhanced security features in prisons.³³ Scholar Adrian Zenz testified at a March 2023 congressional hearing that, beginning in 2019, authorities significantly expanded high-security detention facilities in the XUAR and began shifting detainees from mass internment camps to both prisons and forced labor programs.³⁴ According to Zenz, current XUAR Communist Party Secretary Ma Xingrui appears to have continued the institutionalization of both mass detention and forced labor in the region that was begun by his predecessor, Chen Quanguo.³⁵

Cases of Uyghurs sentenced to long-term imprisonment that were reported this past year include the following:

- **Setiwaldi Kerim.**³⁶ In March 2023, Radio Free Asia (RFA) reported that in 2017, authorities in Atush (Atushi) city, Kizilsu (Kizilesu) Kyrgyz Autonomous Prefecture, detained Uyghur middle school teacher and writer Setiwaldi Kerim, later sentencing him to 19 years in prison for “promoting sepa-

ratism” in his writings and for his role in creating textbooks for middle and high school students.³⁷ Setiwaldi Kerim, who is in his early fifties, was one of a number of people authorities detained for their work on the textbooks, including Uyghur writer and editor **Yalqun Rozi**³⁸ and former XUAR Education Bureau director **Sattar Sawut**.³⁹

- **Ablajan Ayup**.⁴⁰ In December 2022, the Rights Defense Network (RDN) reported that in December 2018, authorities secretly sentenced Uyghur pop singer Ablajan Ayup to 11 years in prison on unknown charges.⁴¹ According to RDN, he was sentenced in connection with his promotion of Uyghur culture and for comments he made during a March 2017 interview with the BBC about using music to make cross-cultural connections that authorities deemed politically sensitive.⁴² In March 2018, prior to his imprisonment, authorities reportedly detained Ablajan Ayup in a mass internment camp in the XUAR.⁴³

- **Abduqadir Jalalidin**.⁴⁴ In January 2023, RFA reported that authorities had tried renowned Xinjiang Normal University professor and poet Abduqadir Jalalidin in the second half of 2019 and later sentenced him to life imprisonment on unknown charges.⁴⁵ In April 2018, RFA reported that authorities detained him in January 2018 and initially held him in a mass internment camp.⁴⁶

- **Imanem Nesrulla and Ayhan Memet**.⁴⁷ In November 2022, RFA reported that in December 2018, an unnamed court in the XUAR sentenced 60-year-old Uyghur veterinary worker Imanem Nesrulla to 15 years in prison on charges related to terrorism and “inciting ethnic hatred.”⁴⁸ A resident of Qumul (Hami) municipality, XUAR, she had visited her son, Munirdin Jadikar, in the Netherlands in 2014 in order to attend his wedding.⁴⁹ In 2018, Munirdin Jadikar’s sister-in-law, Ayhan Memet, informed him via the social media platform WeChat that authorities had detained his mother in a mass internment camp.⁵⁰ In 2019, Munirdin Jadikar learned from an unnamed source that authorities also had detained Ayhan Memet for informing him of his mother’s detention.⁵¹ In 2021, Dutch authorities told Munirdin Jadikar that Chinese embassy officials said authorities had sentenced both his mother and sister-in-law to 15 years in prison.⁵² According to the Chinese embassy officials, Ayhan Memet was sentenced for “illegally providing national intelligence to foreign forces.”⁵³ A police officer interviewed by RFA reportedly said that Imanem Nesrulla was thought to have been detained for having traveled abroad.⁵⁴

As in the past reporting year,⁵⁵ reports emerged documenting the deaths of individuals in mass internment camps and prisons or shortly after they were held in camps or prisons. Examples include the following:

- **Omer Huseyin**, a 55-year-old former hatip (Muslim preacher), and his brother, **Semet Huseyin**, who was around 60 years old.⁵⁶ Authorities detained the men and their two brothers, all of whom were residents of Korla (Ku’erle) city, Bayangol (Bayinguoleng) Mongol Autonomous Prefecture, in

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September 2017, in connection with their religious activities, later sentencing Omer Huseyin to 5 years and Semet Huseyin to 12 years in prison.⁵⁷ Omer Huseyin, whom authorities detained for making the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca in 2015, reportedly died of liver cancer while in prison in February 2022.⁵⁸ Semet Huseyin reportedly died of stomach cancer in a prison hospital in 2021.⁵⁹

- **Abdulla Sawut**, a 72-year-old Uyghur author who died in December 2022 after being released from a detention facility in ill health two months earlier.⁶⁰ Authorities in Kizilsu (Kizilesu) Kyrgyz Autonomous Prefecture detained Abdulla Sawut in 2017, accusing him of involvement in “separatism.”⁶¹ Authorities released him to his family’s custody around October 2022 when his health deteriorated due to an unspecified illness, and he died because of his inability to access medical treatment or adequate food due to a COVID-19-related lockdown in his hometown.⁶²

- **Ilham Rozi**, a 57-year-old Uyghur former propaganda official in Aksu city, Aksu prefecture, who died of an unspecified illness in March 2023, five days after authorities released him from prison.⁶³ Authorities sentenced Ilham Rozi to 15 years in prison on charges related to “separatism” after detaining him in 2019.⁶⁴ Authorities detained Ilham Rozi, who formerly served as deputy head of the Aksu prefecture propaganda department, for having invited Uyghur writer and editor Yalqun Rozi and Uyghur professor and poet Abduqadir Jalalidin to give lectures at schools in 2012 and 2013.⁶⁵

Forced Labor Involving Turkic and Muslim XUAR Residents

During this reporting year, authorities in the XUAR maintained a system of forced labor that involved former mass internment camp detainees and other Turkic and Muslim individuals.⁶⁶ Officials oversaw two distinct types of forced labor—one involving current and former mass internment camp detainees, and the other, entitled “poverty alleviation through labor transfer” (*tuopin zhuanyi jiuye*), involving people who usually have not been detained, often referred to as “surplus labor.”⁶⁷ A report published by Adrian Zenz documented the use of both types of forced labor in cotton production in the XUAR and noted that “the primary driver of labor coercion in cotton production is labor transfer policies and not internment camps.”⁶⁸ A report issued by then-U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet in August 2022 also found evidence of forced labor in “labor transfer” programs and in programs using the labor of mass internment camp detainees.⁶⁹

In July 2022, U.N. Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery Tomoya Obokata issued a report which found that in some instances, forced labor involving Uyghurs, Kazakhs, and other ethnic minorities in the XUAR “may amount to enslavement as a crime against humanity.”⁷⁰ Obokata cited “excessive surveillance, abusive living and working conditions, restriction of movement through internment, threats, physical and/or sexual violence and other inhuman or degrading treatment” as indicators of the act of enslavement.⁷¹

In its annual report released in February 2023, the International Labour Organization's (ILO) Committee of Experts expressed concern about the forced labor of Uyghurs and other ethnic minorities in the XUAR.⁷² The Committee stressed the need for the Chinese government to enact legislation that explicitly defines and prohibits direct and indirect discrimination as set out in the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention.⁷³ The Committee further urged the Chinese government to clarify how it ensured compliance with the equal rights provisions contained in its Labour Law of 1994 and the revised Vocational Education Law (2022), and "to confirm that the Employment Promotion Law of 2007 prohibits discrimination based on colour, national extraction, social origin and political opinion."⁷⁴

UFLPA ENFORCEMENT AND FORCED LABOR PRODUCTS IN THE UNITED STATES

In spite of the enforcement, beginning in June 2022,⁷⁵ of the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act (UFLPA), which bans importation to the U.S. of goods made in the XUAR,⁷⁶ some products made in the XUAR continued to be imported into the U.S. In August 2022, the Uyghur Human Rights Project published a report documenting the presence of more than 70 brands of red dates grown or processed in the XUAR in stores in and around Washington, D.C.⁷⁷ These included at least three brands of dates likely produced or processed by the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps.⁷⁸ According to trade analysts at U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), one of the challenges facing CBP officials is XUAR producers' use of entities outside of the XUAR to ship products outside of China, in order to conceal the origin of their products.⁷⁹

A report published by Sheffield Hallam University and non-profit research organization NomoGaia in December 2022 indicated that more than 100 international automobile and automotive parts manufacturers were at risk of sourcing from companies in the XUAR that employ forced labor.⁸⁰ The report's authors found that links between Western automotive companies and Uyghur forced labor were present and expanding in all aspects of manufacturing, ranging from "hood decals and car frames to engine casings, interiors and electronics."⁸¹ Automobile parts imported into the United States by companies at risk of sourcing forced labor products in the XUAR include aluminum alloy wheels produced by Xinfu Wheels; lithium-ion batteries produced by CATL (also known as Contemporary Amperex Technology or Ningde Times New Energy Technology); and tires from a subsidiary of Double Coin (Xinjiang) Kunlun Engineering Tire Co., Ltd., among others.⁸² [For more information on forced labor involving Turkic and Muslim XUAR residents, see Chapter 14—Business and Human Rights and Chapter 10—Human Trafficking.]

Repressive Surveillance Technology and Security Measures

Reports published this past year indicated that XUAR authorities have used both technological and human surveillance to comprehensively monitor and control Turkic and Muslim groups in the

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XUAR.⁸³ The report issued in August 2022 by the Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights on human rights conditions in the XUAR documented allegations of the Chinese government's use of "extensive forms of intensive surveillance and control" directed at Uyghur and other predominantly Muslim ethnic groups.⁸⁴ In March 2023, Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, U.N. Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights while countering terrorism, cited concerns over XUAR authorities' collection of residents' biometric data, as well as the Xinjiang Public Security Bureau's use of drones.⁸⁵ Scholars Gerald Roche and James Leibold described how authorities in the XUAR surveilled and identified Uyghurs and others considered "a danger to the stability and prosperity of the community," marking them for further monitoring or detention in camps or prisons.⁸⁶

Researchers, journalists, and others documented XUAR authorities' use of surveillance cameras, including those produced by Chinese surveillance technology company Hikvision, to monitor and restrict Uyghurs and others in the XUAR.⁸⁷ In April 2023, Axios reported that, based on a recording of a meeting held by Hikvision, the company was aware that some of its contracts in the XUAR discussed targeting the Uyghur population.⁸⁸ Authorities have used footage from surveillance cameras produced by Hikvision to track and detain Uyghurs and others in the XUAR.⁸⁹ In March 2023, three former mass internment camp detainees spoke at a U.N. panel about how Hikvision cameras monitored detainees' every movement, marking them for punishment if they violated camp rules.⁹⁰

In May 2023, Human Rights Watch reported that police in the XUAR had abused surveillance technology in the implementation of a phone search program used to flag Turkic Muslims for interrogation.⁹¹ Human Rights Watch's investigation found that more than half of the files flagged on residents' mobile phones during the searches, which took place in 2017 and 2018, appeared to be common Islamic religious materials, such as readings of the Quran.⁹²

COVID-19-Related Restrictions Lead to Deaths, Medical Issues in the XUAR

During this reporting year, authorities in the XUAR imposed lockdowns and other restrictions on the freedom of movement and travel in response to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, restrictions that reportedly resulted in deaths, starvation, and lack of access to medicine and medical care. Officials implemented some of the longest lockdowns in the country in the region.⁹³ In October 2022, authorities suspended train and bus service in and out of the XUAR and reduced flight capacity to and from the region, in order to prevent the spread of COVID-19 from the XUAR to other parts of China.⁹⁴ In September 2022, Radio Free Asia reported that at least 13 people in a village in Hotan prefecture, XUAR, had died as a result of poisoning from disinfectant sprayed in and around their homes as part of official measures to combat COVID-19.⁹⁵ Due to a strict anti-COVID-19 lockdown that began in early August, some residents of Ghulja (Yining) city, Ili (Yili) Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture, XUAR, reportedly died due to starvation, a lack of medical care, or a lack of medicine.⁹⁶ Dur-

ing the lockdown, authorities locked some residents of the Ghulja area inside their homes.⁹⁷ Unverified videos and other postings regarding Uyghurs in Ghulja experiencing health problems or medical issues caused or exacerbated by effects of the lockdown were widely circulated on Chinese social media.⁹⁸ An official directive that was leaked and posted online called on government or Party personnel to flood microblog Weibo with positive posts about Ili, since this location name was trending due to messages posted by Uyghurs begging for assistance.⁹⁹ In September, Ili officials held a press conference to apologize for residents' lack of access to medical services during the lockdown.¹⁰⁰

Harsh Policies Lead to Multiple Deaths and Injuries in Urumqi Fire

Zero-COVID measures and discriminatory policies toward Uyghurs reportedly caused or contributed to deaths and injuries during a fire that took place on November 24, 2022, at a high-rise apartment building in Urumqi municipality, XUAR. According to officials, 10 people died in the fire and 9 were injured, but reports from international media and civil society cast doubt on the official death toll, saying local sources indicated that up to 40 or more residents may have died in the fire.¹⁰¹ Local officials told RFA that all of those who died were Uyghurs.¹⁰² International media and civil society also reported that, contrary to official reports, the apartment building had “recently been placed under a stricter level of lockdown,”¹⁰³ and that residents’ doors had been locked shut from the outside, preventing their escape.¹⁰⁴ In addition, according to international reports, firefighters may have been hampered in their efforts by both zero-COVID restrictions and anti-terrorism controls targeting local Uyghurs.¹⁰⁵

Among the victims of the fire identified in international media reports were Qemernisa Abdurahman and four of her children, Shehide, Imran, Abdurahman, and Nehdiye, all five of whom reportedly died of smoke inhalation.¹⁰⁶ Qemernisa Abdurahman’s husband **Memet’eli Metniyaz** was reportedly serving a lengthy prison sentence at the time of the fire, and her oldest son, **Ilyas Memet’eli**, was detained in either a prison or a mass internment camp.¹⁰⁷ Many other men who had formerly lived at the apartment building were reportedly also detained in prisons or camps.¹⁰⁸

Immediately following the incident, authorities suppressed information about the fire, which they viewed as a national security issue,¹⁰⁹ by holding Uyghur survivors for questioning at a local hotel and confiscating their phones;¹¹⁰ detaining neighbors and acquaintances of victims who posted about the fire on social media;¹¹¹ and detaining a 24-year-old woman living in Urumqi for 10 days for “spreading rumors” online after she posted about the fire’s death toll on Weibo.¹¹²

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Harsh Policies Lead to Multiple Deaths and Injuries in Urumqi Fire—Continued

On November 25, sparked by news of the fire, residents of Urumqi began protesting against zero-COVID restrictions, and within days, protests spread to dozens of cities across China.¹¹³ Many Han Chinese residents within and outside of the XUAR participated in protests, but Uyghurs were reportedly too frightened to take part, due to their fear of harsh treatment from authorities.¹¹⁴ In December 2022, authorities in Atush (Atushi) city, Kizilsu (Kizilesu) Kyrgyz Autonomous Prefecture, XUAR, detained Uyghur university student **Kamile Wayit**, in connection with a social media post she made regarding the protests and with communications she had with her brother in the United States.¹¹⁵ In June 2023, international media reported that according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, authorities had sentenced her to prison for an unspecified length of time for the crime of “advocating extremism.”¹¹⁶ Authorities detained dozens of people throughout China in relation to the protests, but reports indicated that at least some of those detained had been released by April, including a number of individuals released on bail.¹¹⁷ [For more information on the protests that took place after the November 24 fire in Urumqi, see Chapter 1—Freedom of Expression and Chapter 12—Public Health.]

Persecution of Ethnic Minority Women in the XUAR

FORCED INTERETHNIC MARRIAGES

A report published in November 2022 by the Uyghur Human Rights Project provided evidence that Chinese Communist Party and government authorities had incentivized and likely forced marriages between Han Chinese and Uyghur and other Turkic individuals in the XUAR since at least 2014.¹¹⁸ The report noted that the rate of Uyghur-Han intermarriage had been increasing since 2018 due to state promotion, following a period between 1990 and 2010 in which the rate of Uyghur-Han marriages had declined significantly due to interethnic tensions.¹¹⁹ The report showed that forced marriages were part of a range of state-sponsored gender-based violence targeting Uyghur women, alongside “sexual assault, forced sterilization, forced use of birth control devices, [and] forced abortions.”¹²⁰ The report outlined how authorities promoted the assimilation of Uyghurs and other ethnic minorities through interethnic marriages against a backdrop of government and Party birth restriction policies and policies to encourage Han Chinese in-migration and the movement of ethnic minority laborers out of the XUAR.¹²¹ Forced marriage violates the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and the U.N. Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (Palermo Protocol).¹²²

POPULATION CONTROL MEASURES TARGETING ETHNIC MINORITY WOMEN

Reports continued to emerge this past year of XUAR authorities’ implementation of population control measures targeting Turkic

Muslim women in the region. The report issued by the Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights in August 2022 regarding the human rights situation in the XUAR raised concerns over a sharp decline in birth rates beginning in 2017 in primarily Uyghur-majority areas, which corresponded with an “unusually sharp” rise in sterilizations and IUD placements in the XUAR.¹²³ The report cited allegations of birth control forced upon Uyghur and Kazakh women, as well as interviewees’ accounts of the risk of detention as punishment for noncompliance.¹²⁴ However, this section of the report was reportedly weakened because of pressure from PRC officials, who sought to minimize discussion of forced sterilization since it is one of the acts constituting genocide.¹²⁵

RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS CRITICIZE CHINA IN ADVANCE OF CEDAW
REVIEW

In April 2023, Uyghur advocacy organizations submitted reports to the U.N. Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW Committee), in advance of the Committee’s review of China, that documented China’s violations of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.¹²⁶ For example, the Uyghur Human Rights Project (UHRP) criticized China’s response to the List of Issues transmitted by the Committee in 2021, including China’s failure to provide disaggregated data on declining Uyghur birth rates in response to concerns about the forced abortion and forced sterilization of Uyghur women. UHRP additionally challenged China’s insistence that it protects women’s right to marry freely, despite evidence indicating that the Chinese government has forced Uyghur women into interethnic marriages.¹²⁷

Detention of Ethnic Kazakhs

Reports published this past year indicated that XUAR officials continued to arbitrarily detain and hold in detention ethnic Kazakhs, members of an ethnic group numbering around 1.5 million in the region.¹²⁸ Kazakhstan-based relatives of many ethnic Kazakhs who have been detained in the XUAR since 2017 have campaigned publicly for their release.¹²⁹ According to a Kazakh activist and an ethnic Kazakh formerly detained in the XUAR who were interviewed by Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty, authorities required people seeking permission to leave the XUAR to go abroad to first register relatives as “hostages,” in an effort to discourage them from talking about their detainment.¹³⁰

Xinjiang

Detention of Former Mass Internment Camp Detainee Zhanargul Zhumatai

The case of ethnic Kazakh Zhanargul Zhumatai exemplifies the risks facing former detainees who speak publicly about their past detention, and highlights the potential for official retaliation against their relatives.¹³¹ On February 10, 2023, authorities detained 47-year-old Zhanargul Zhumatai at a family member's home in the XUAR.¹³² A musician and former journalist who had lived in Kazakhstan and held a Kazakh residence permit, she had also spoken out about the rights of ethnic Kazakh herders in the XUAR.¹³³ In 2017, on a visit back to the XUAR from Kazakhstan, Zhanargul Zhumatai was detained and held in a mass internment camp for two years, reportedly for having Facebook and Instagram apps (deemed as “non-mainstream” software) on her phone and for having traveled to Kazakhstan, considered by PRC officials to be a “focus country.”¹³⁴ While detained in the camp, she developed an ulcer that was treated incorrectly, and lost more than 66 pounds, and she also suffered from heart palpitations as a result of her camp detention.¹³⁵ Following her release from the camp, she spoke to international media and other international observers about her detention and subsequent surveillance and police harassment.¹³⁶ She said that after she spoke out about her experiences, security personnel pressured her to check into a psychiatric hospital in order to avoid being detained.¹³⁷ In January 2023, she received a visa to return to Kazakhstan, and submitted an application for a new passport to Chinese authorities.¹³⁸

On February 13, authorities detained Zhanargul Zhumatai's mother, sister, and two brothers, which a police officer said was due to their failure to stop Zhanargul Zhumatai from speaking with foreign journalists.¹³⁹ It was unclear where authorities held Zhanargul Zhumatai and her family members, and whether or not authorities charged them with any crimes.¹⁴⁰ As of August 15, 2023, the Commission had not observed reports indicating that authorities had released Zhanargul Zhumatai or any members of her family from detention.

Additional representative cases of ethnic Kazakhs formerly detained in the XUAR that were reported on this past year include those of writer and businesswoman **Zhazira Asenqyzy**, whose fractured skull remained untreated during her time in a mass internment camp;¹⁴¹ **Sarsenbek Akbar**, a veterinarian, trader, and former village head who was detained in a mass internment camp for two to three years, possibly for having the messaging app WhatsApp installed on his cell phone;¹⁴² and **Baqytkhan Myrzan**, a 60-year-old imam who died around March 2023 in a prison in Urumqi municipality, where he was serving a 14-year sentence for performing an Islamic ritual at a religious function.¹⁴³

Freedom of Religion

XUAR government officials curtailed Muslim residents' freedom to practice their religious beliefs, including by implementing restrictions on prayer and reciting the Quran at home¹⁴⁴ and by holding Turkic Muslims in detention for practicing Islam.¹⁴⁵ As in previous reporting years,¹⁴⁶ XUAR officials imposed controls on

Muslims' observance of Ramadan.¹⁴⁷ In Turpan municipality, police reportedly assigned Uyghur villagers and members of neighborhood committees to monitor local residents, in order to ensure that no one was fasting.¹⁴⁸ According to a rights advocate who documents the rights of ethnic Kazakhs in the XUAR, authorities in Ili (Yili) Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture carried out "mass detentions" of religious figures in the lead-up to Ramadan, focusing on individuals who had previously been detained.¹⁴⁹

Reports published this past year showed that authorities have sentenced Turkic Muslims in the XUAR to lengthy prison terms.¹⁵⁰ In one example, RFA reported that in 2018, an unidentified court in Keriye (Yutian) county, Hotan (Hetian) prefecture, sentenced Uyghur imam **Memet Musa** and his son **Osman Memet** to 10 and 6 years in prison, respectively, for their religious activities.¹⁵¹ Authorities in Keriye detained Memet Musa in 2017 for "illegally" providing religious instruction to his son when he was a child.¹⁵² Authorities detained Osman Memet in the same year for reciting the Quran at several local funerals.¹⁵³ [For more information on official restrictions on Muslims' right to practice their faith throughout China, see Chapter 3—Freedom of Religion.]

Transnational Repression of Uyghurs and Other Turkic Muslims

Reports published this past year documented the PRC's continued transnational repression of Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims through harassment and intimidation, in order to prevent them from speaking out about human rights conditions in the XUAR.¹⁵⁴ A report authored by researchers David Tobin and Nyrola Elimä and published by Sheffield Hallam University in April 2023 documented how PRC authorities have shifted their methods of transnational repression in order to evade international scrutiny.¹⁵⁵ Citing official documents, individual case studies, and other materials, the authors showed how PRC authorities surveilled Uyghurs in the United Kingdom and Turkey, using threats to their family members in the XUAR to compel them to spy on other Uyghurs or refrain from engaging in human rights advocacy.¹⁵⁶ The report also documented the risks of long-term detention and deportation facing Uyghurs who flee to Thailand from China.¹⁵⁷

Notes to Chapter 18—Xinjiang

¹James T. Areddy and Chun Han Wong, “China’s Xi Made Rare Visit to Xinjiang,” *Wall Street Journal*, July 15, 2022; James Millward, “(Identity) Politics in Command: Xi Jinping’s July Visit to Xinjiang,” *China Story*, August 16, 2022; Alim Seytoff, “Xi Jinping’s Xinjiang Visit May Signal New Emphasis on the Assimilation of Uyghurs,” *Radio Free Asia*, July 19, 2022. See also “Xi Jinping zai Xinjiang kaocha shi qiangdiao wanzheng zhunque guanche xin shidai Dang de zhi Jiang fanglüe jianshe tuanjie hexie fanrong fuyu wenming jinbu anju leye shengtai lianghao de meihao Xinjiang” [During his visit to Xinjiang, Xi Jinping emphasized that it is necessary to fully and accurately implement the Party’s Xinjiang governance strategy in the new era, and to build a beautiful Xinjiang that is united, harmonious, prosperous, well-off, civilized, progressive, living and working in peace, and has a good environment], *Xinhua*, July 15, 2022.

²“Xi Jinping zai Xinjiang kaocha shi qiangdiao wanzheng zhunque guanche xin shidai Dang de zhi Jiang fanglüe jianshe tuanjie hexie fanrong fuyu wenming jinbu anju leye shengtai lianghao de meihao Xinjiang” [During his visit to Xinjiang, Xi Jinping emphasized that it is necessary to fully and accurately implement the Party’s Xinjiang governance strategy in the new era, and to build a beautiful Xinjiang that is united, harmonious, prosperous, well-off, civilized, progressive, living and working in peace, and has a good environment], *Xinhua*, July 15, 2022; James Millward, “(Identity) Politics in Command: Xi Jinping’s July Visit to Xinjiang,” *China Story*, August 16, 2022; James T. Areddy and Chun Han Wong, “China’s Xi Made Rare Visit to Xinjiang,” *Wall Street Journal*, July 15, 2022.

³James T. Areddy and Chun Han Wong, “China’s Xi Made Rare Visit to Xinjiang,” *Wall Street Journal*, July 15, 2022; Chris Buckley et al., “China’s Communist Party Congress: For His 3rd Term, Xi Jinping Surrounds Himself with Loyalists,” *New York Times*, October 30, 2022; Vladimir Isachenkov and Kim Tong-hyung, “Xi Awarded 3rd Term as China’s President, Extending Rule,” *Associated Press*, March 10, 2023.

⁴Zhao Kezhi, “Zai tingqu Xinjiang Zizhiq gong’an he wending gongzuo huibao shi de jianghua” [Speech given while listening to the report on public security and stability work on the Xinjiang Autonomous Region], June 5, 2018, 2, 6, translated in Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation, “Xinjiang Police Files”; Adrian Zenz, “Public Security Minister’s Speech Describes Xi Jinping’s Direction of Mass Detentions in Xinjiang,” *ChinaFile*, Asia Society, May 24, 2022.

⁵Zhao Kezhi, “Zai tingqu Xinjiang Zizhiq gong’an he wending gongzuo huibao shi de jianghua” [Speech given while listening to the report on public security and stability work on the Xinjiang Autonomous Region], June 5, 2018, 1, 7, 9, translated in Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation, “Xinjiang Police Files”; Adrian Zenz, “Public Security Minister’s Speech Describes Xi Jinping’s Direction of Mass Detentions in Xinjiang,” *ChinaFile*, Asia Society, May 24, 2022.

⁶Adrian Zenz, “Public Security Minister’s Speech Describes Xi Jinping’s Direction of Mass Detentions in Xinjiang,” *ChinaFile*, Asia Society, May 24, 2022; Zhao Kezhi, “Zai tingqu Xinjiang Zizhiq gong’an he wending gongzuo huibao shi de jianghua” [Speech given while listening to the report on public security and stability work on the Xinjiang Autonomous Region], June 5, 2018, 6, translated in Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation “Xinjiang Police Files.”

⁷James Millward, “China’s New Anti-Uyghur Campaign,” *Foreign Affairs*, January 23, 2023. See also Human Rights Watch, “China: Xinjiang Official Figures Reveal Higher Prisoner Count,” September 14, 2022; *The Chinese Communist Party’s Ongoing Uyghur Genocide, Hearing of the Select Committee on the CCP, U.S. House of Representatives*, 118th Cong. (2023) (testimony of Adrian Zenz, Senior Fellow and Director of China Studies, Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation), 14, 53.

⁸Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, “OHCHR Assessment of Human Rights Concerns in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, People’s Republic of China,” August 31, 2022, para. 143; Vicky Xiuzhong Xu, Daria Impiombato, and Nathan Ruser, “UN Uyghur Report Leaves No Room for Denial and No Excuse for Inaction,” *Strategist*, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, September 3, 2022.

⁹Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, “OHCHR Assessment of Human Rights Concerns in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, People’s Republic of China,” August 31, 2022, para. 148.

¹⁰Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, “OHCHR Assessment of Human Rights Concerns in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, People’s Republic of China,” August 31, 2022. For documentation of cultural and religious persecution, see paras. 80–93; for rape, see paras. 73 and 78; for torture, see paras. 1, 6, 70, 74–78, and 145; for violations of reproductive rights, see paras. 79, 104–14, and 146; and for forced labor, see paras. 1 and 115–28.

¹¹Austin Ramzy, “For Uyghurs, U.N. Report on China’s Abuses Is Long-Awaited Vindication,” *New York Times*, September 1, 2022; “Opinion: The U.N. Report on China’s Atrocities against the Uyghurs Is Damning,” editorial, *Washington Post*, September 2, 2022; Reid Standish, “After Years of Chinese Pressure, Uyghur Activists Welcome UN Report on Xinjiang Abuses,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, September 1, 2022.

¹²Austin Ramzy, “For Uyghurs, U.N. Report on China’s Abuses Is Long-Awaited Vindication,” *New York Times*, September 1, 2022; Stuart Lau, “China Direct: Damning UN Report—Crimes against Humanity—No Fan of Gorbachev,” *Politico*, September 1, 2022; Jo Smith Finley, “Comment: UN Report on Abuse of Uyghurs Misses a Vital Word: Genocide,” Newcastle University Press Office, September 7, 2022.

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¹⁶ Rachel Cheung, “UN Human Rights Chief Is Silent on China’s Abuses in Xinjiang, and Scholars Are Fuming,” *Vice*, June 8, 2022.

¹⁷ See also Congressional-Executive Commission on China, *2022 Annual Report* (Washington: November 2022), 306.

¹⁸ Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, “Human Rights Council Adopts 21 Texts and Rejects One Draft Decision, Extends Mandates on Older Persons, Right to Development, Arbitrary Detention, Mercenaries, Slavery, Indigenous Peoples, Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation,” October 6, 2022; Patrick Wintour, “UN Vote to Ignore Human Rights Abuses in China Leaves West in Dead End,” *Guardian*, October 6, 2022.

¹⁹ Amnesty International, “China: Xinjiang Vote Failure Betrays Core Mission of UN Human Rights Council,” October 6, 2022; Patrick Wintour, “UN Vote to Ignore Human Rights Abuses in China Leaves West in Dead End,” *Guardian*, October 6, 2022.

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²⁶ Uyghur Genocide Accountability and Sanctions Act of 2023, S. 1770, 118th Cong. (2023).

²⁷ Uyghur Genocide Accountability and Sanctions Act of 2023, S. 1770, 118th Cong. (2023), sec. 2; “Rubio, Merkley Introduce Landmark Legislation to Hold the CCP Accountable for Crimes in Xinjiang,” Office of Senator Marco Rubio, May 31, 2023; Marti Flacks, “What’s Next for the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act?,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, June 21, 2023.

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²⁹ Human Rights Watch, “China: Xinjiang Official Figures Reveal Higher Prisoner Count,” September 14, 2022; Emily Feng and John Ruwitch, “The United Nations Says Crimes against Humanity May Have Happened in China’s Xinjiang,” *NPR*, August 31, 2022.

³⁰ Human Rights Watch, “China: Xinjiang Official Figures Reveal Higher Prisoner Count,” September 14, 2022. As noted by Human Rights Watch, the Xinjiang High People’s Court has not released data on official sentencing figures or sentencing breakdowns for the years following 2017.

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³⁴ *The Chinese Communist Party’s Ongoing Uyghur Genocide, Hearing of the Select Committee on the CCP, U.S. House of Representatives*, 118th Cong. (2023) (testimony of Adrian Zenz, Senior

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Fellow and Director of China Studies, Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation), 1:15:27–1:16:07 and 1:50:24–1:50:49. Adrian Zenz refers to mass internment camps as “vocational centers” and “reeducation camps.”

³⁵ *The Chinese Communist Party's Ongoing Uyghur Genocide, Hearing of the Select Committee on the CCP, U.S. House of Representatives*, 118th Cong. (2023) (testimony of Adrian Zenz, Senior Fellow and Director of China Studies, Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation), 27, 46. See also Ma Xingrui, “Wei shixian Xinjiang shehui wending he changzhi jiu'an tigong jianqiang baozhang” [Provide a strong guarantee for the realization of social stability and long-term stability in Xinjiang], *People's Daily*, April 21, 2022.

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⁴⁷ Shohret Hoshur, “China Sentences Mother of Uyghur Dutch Airman to 15 Years for Visiting Him Abroad,” *Radio Free Asia*, November 17, 2022. For more information, see the Commission's Political Prisoner Database records 2023-00026 on Imanem Nesrulla and 2023-00027 on Ayhan Memet.

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